

Knowing of your interest in veterans issues and with Memorial Day almost upon us, I thought I'd take the opportunity to share a speech that I will be giving this Monday in Sutter County to honor those who have made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of our nation.

Good morning. Thank you for the invitation to join you today. It's an honor to celebrate Memorial Day with all of you gathered here. I would like to thank the Sutter Cemetery District, our local veteran's groups and Blue Star Moms, the Honor Guard and all the men and women of Beale Air Force Base -- you make us all so proud. And how about those T-38 Talons? I'm just grateful those pilots are on our side! Finally, thank you to all of you today who have come to honor those who have given their all and continue to serve on our behalf.

America's veterans have sacrificed greatly to preserve, protect, and defend the rights and privileges cherished by citizens of the United States. As we observe Memorial Day, let's step back and reflect on the service that millions of Americans have given our nation. Throughout American history, more than 35 million American military personnel left their families to serve their country during wartime. We are gathered here today to honor those who, as Abraham Lincoln said in his Gettysburg Address, "Gave the last full measure of devotion" in all our wars throughout our history.

Our great nation would never been founded, nor our freedoms preserved, without the courage and tenacity of men and women throughout our history who died fighting for an ideal - a free government of the people, by the people, and for the people. This ideal has transformed the world for over two hundred years. This Memorial Day, we are reminded again that none of these great victories for humanity would have been possible but for the brave and selfless Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of this preeminent American ideal. In our Second Congressional District, we pause to honor the fifteen brave men who have fallen in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Why did America's fallen give their all? The answer of course is that they gave their all so America would become free and remain free. America's love of freedom compelled Thomas Jefferson to declare our independence and thousands to fight for it. It made it impossible for slavery in our land to continue any longer. It caused us to rise against the evil of fascism and the unspeakable brutality of the Holocaust. It kept us determined as we stood face to face against the scourge of communism. And today, it demands that we stand firmly against terrorists who long for America's dying day. Our nation's defining cause-the cause of freedom and the fidelity to that freedom by those that serve-has made the United States the greatest

nation the world has ever seen, and has made the world a safer and more peaceful place.

On President Reagan's final day in office, his national security advisor Colin Powell famously told him, "The world is quiet today, Mr. President." Well, that might have been true right after Soviet communism crumbled, but it was true for just a brief moment. You see, the sad reality is that somewhere in the world there will always be some ruthless dictator who has no regard for human life, some aggressive regime that seeks regional dominance, some radical group whose ideology is rooted in hatred and violence. These hostile groups and regimes frequently threaten our national security and the freedoms that we have fought for and cherish. And because of that, there will always be a need for the service and sacrifices of the American soldier, the American sailor, the American airman, and the American Marine.

As we gather today, America is a nation at war. We must not forget that. Tens of thousands of Americans troops are deployed in combat at this very moment. We must not forget them. These brave men and women are placing nation above self, and they are fighting to protect our national security and our treasured freedoms. On this Memorial Day, we thank and honor them.

In Iraq, our troops have replaced a brutal dictator with a young but strengthening democracy. They have repelled a violent insurgency and handed al Qaeda forces and other militants a major defeat. While the progress remains tenuous, stability and security in Iraq are within sight. A stable and secure Iraq will bolster our security by standing with us in the war against jihadists and showcasing democracy's virtues to neighboring countries in the Middle East. As this new partner for peace becomes even stronger, I'm very pleased that American troops will return home by the thousands. And I believe the best way to honor those who have fallen or been wounded during this mission is to successfully complete what they bled and died to achieve.

I recently had the privilege of inviting two wounded Iraq War veterans to President Obama's Inauguration. Air Force Sgt. Chris Frost of Chico and Army Specialist David Mayer of Redding received amputee wounds in Iraq in 2008 and treatment at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in our nation's capital. I was inspired by their remarkable courage and uplifting spirit. A few weeks ago I saw Sgt. Frost again, this time right after he finished a 10-mile bike ride at the steps of the U.S. Capitol building. His feat was both remarkable and, yes, a bit humbling! Above all, it was motivating, because who among us would want their sacrifices to go in vain, or would want to abort their mission short of success even as so many wounded veterans would return to the battlefield given the chance?

Over in Afghanistan, the U.S. military is on the frontlines of the battle against the Taliban, the

same group that harbored al Qaeda and allowed Bin Laden to plot the September 11 attacks. It is a difficult counterinsurgency mission that will require both military might and gently convincing impoverished Afghans that there are better ways to earn a day's pay than fighting for the Taliban. It will also require Afghan forces to grow in number and strength. And it likely will require continued strikes against high value terrorists along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. As our troops implement a new strategy in Afghanistan, we must remember that this mission is vital to our security. A stable ally in Afghanistan will deny al Qaeda a safe haven to train and plot attacks. On the other hand, the Taliban would again welcome the jihadists with open arms if they returned to power. We cannot allow that to happen.

There are other potential threats to our security and way of life on the horizon. Most alarming, I'm deeply concerned about Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons and their radical leadership's hatred for Israel and yearning for regional dominance. Iran has repeatedly defied the demands of the United Nations to stop its uranium enrichment program. It is now believed they have the capacity to make one nuclear bomb with further uranium enrichment. A nuclear Iran would threaten the very existence of Israel and spark an arms race between this Persian country and Arab nations in the Middle East. Iran also supports terrorism, including Hezbollah and Hamas, and has targeted U.S. troops in Iraq. For these reasons, a nuclear Iran would severely threaten our security and the security of many American allies. I believe that nations that value liberty and peace must stand strongly against Iran's dangerous behavior, and that the United States must confront this looming crisis with resolve and strength.

So unfortunately the world is far from quiet today and the mission of the American servicemember- defending our way of life and protecting our freedoms-remains as important as ever. We cannot adequately express our gratitude to those who find it their duty to defend our nation in uniform, and especially those who find it their destiny to die that America's great ideals may live on.

Today we honor the fallen, we commit to caring for the wounded, and we pledge to support our military families in every way possible. Our honor of fallen heroes must not be limited to one day, because we live from the fruit of their sacrifices each and every day. All of our veterans, living and departed, deserve the respect, admiration, and gratitude of the citizens of the United States. When you see a soldier or veteran, thank them for their service. We cannot even begin to thank them enough. Let us never forget. Thank you, and God bless our great nation.